



Families of spinsters in East-Flanders (village of Zele), c. 1900.

## 8 The Low Countries, 1750–2000

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Rural households in the Low Countries encountered enormous changes in the period 1750–2000. Whereas in the beginning of this period a large majority of the households still depended, in one way or another, on agricultural activities, nowadays only few of them earn their income in the agricultural sector. This transition coincided with an adaptation to so-called urbanised lifestyles; the term ‘deruralisation’ was coined to denote this process. The concept deruralisation aims to grasp the decreasing impact of the former rural and agricultural ways of living, both in an economic and a social sense. Deruralisation does not necessarily imply urbanisation or the depopulation of the countryside, but it definitely leads to a dominance of labour and income strategies that are detached from former rural ways of living. In the past two centuries rural households developed multiple strategies to adapt to these new patterns of living. In the Low Countries, this process of deruralisation is linked to a rapid population growth, especially after 1850. The guiding questions in this overview are: How did these transitions affect household demographic and economic survival strategies? How important were regional differences, and do we notice a process of convergence with more general patterns?

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Low Countries comprised the states of Belgium (about 10.7 million inhabitants in 2010), Luxembourg (0.5 million inhabitants) and the Netherlands (16.5 million inhabitants). Politically these countries were united in one nation from 1815 until 1830. Economically and socially the regional differences within and among these three countries were considerable. In this contribution, we try to grasp the impact of these regional differences by using an ‘ideal-typical’ distinction between three agro-systems that by and large shaped the rural economies in the Low Countries. These agro-systems, with roots much older than the eighteenth century, preconfigured family formation and income and labour strategies until deep in the twentieth century. The first type is characterised by (relatively large) market-oriented farms, and a large supply of agricultural wage labour. Typical regions were the clay areas (such as Groningen, Friesland, Holland, the Brabant region south of Brussels) and the coastal and Scheldt polders. In the second type of agro-system farmers and peasants with relatively small and partly market-oriented farms were dominant, as in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the Netherlands (Drenthe and parts of Overijssel, Gelderland, Utrecht, Brabant and Limbourg), the Dutch and Belgian Campine and the Ardennes region. Wage labour was only of limited importance. In the third agro-system households had a long tradition of combining agricultural and proto-industrial production. The textile industries in the rural regions of Inner-Flanders and Twente and the iron making region around Liège are well-known examples.

These agro-systems underwent huge transformations after 1850. Thriving proto-industrial regions decayed, sometimes at a rapid speed as the story of Flanders

MAP 8.1 The Low Countries, 1750–2000



illustrates. Other rural areas transformed into expansive industrial or agricultural labour markets. In the Walloon Meuse valley a flourishing mine and metallurgic industry absorbed the excess rural labour supply. Agro-industrial complexes such as the Groningen and Drenthe peat colonies created flexible labour markets that allowed workers to combine agricultural and industrial labour (sugar, potato-flour and strawboard industry). Many hybrid or transitional forms of these three regional agro-systems existed. However, in analysing the impact of the changing and disappearing agro-systems on the living and working conditions of the households this subdivision can be clarifying. In addition, we must stress that country-specific differences between Belgium and the Netherlands also played a major role, especially on the level of national legislation, social and economic policies and religion-related cultural differences.

Finally, it is important to draw attention to the timing of the process of deruralisation. Although in this respect too regional developments can diverge strongly, it is possible to discern three major periods of transition. First, from the eighteenth until the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the 'old' agricultural and proto-industrial systems came under growing pressure. The majority of the (increasing number of) rural households faced major problems due to the decreasing opportunities of the traditional survival strategies. Second, from the last quarter of the nineteenth until the middle of the twentieth century, a 'modernised' family-based agriculture developed together with a growing supply of rural commuters. Third, in the second half of the twentieth century the industrialisation of farm work erased regional differences in favour of a much more uniform agricultural system. Most of the country dwellers adopted a (sub) urban lifestyle (Segers and Van Molle, 2004; Karel, 2005).

## 8.1 The family and demography

Population figures in the Low Countries not only reveal similar trends, but also show remarkable differences. All regions went through the 'classic' demographic transition. However, in the Netherlands this process was accompanied by persistently higher birth rates and much more rapid downswings in death rates than in Belgium. Consequently, population growth in the Netherlands was much faster, multiplying (nearly) eight times between 1800 and 2000, as against (just over) three times in Belgium and Luxembourg. These diverging trends can mostly be explained by differences in economic and cultural patterns. Belgian industrialisation triggered a fast decline in fertility rates in the Walloon provinces Hainaut and Liège from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards. In the Netherlands industrialisation started later, partly explaining the high birth rates. In the historical literature the perpetuation of traditional cultural patterns in the Catholic part of the population (about 40 per cent of the total population) is often mentioned as an important factor. As a religious minority in the north, their elites aimed to strengthen their position by propagating families with many children. This moral and intellectual stance prevented the acceptance of modern patterns of family planning for a considerable time - at least until the sixties of the twentieth century. Moreover, the birth rates within the orthodox branches of the Dutch Protestants also remained relatively high during most of the twentieth century. The principle of 'self

regulation within one's own religious group' prevented direct state intervention in the sphere of the family (in the form of birth control and family planning). As a result large families were rather common in the Dutch countryside until the second part of the twentieth century. It was only in the 1960s that contraceptive practices became virtually universal in the Netherlands (Schoonheim, 2005).

The timing of the demographic transition was marked by significant regional differences as well. This becomes evident when we look at the age and frequency of marriage in the Netherlands. Until the 1950s marriage frequency in urban regions in the Netherlands was higher than in rural areas. This was more pronounced in non-coastal areas, where rural dwellers tended to marry later than urban couples. The percentage of married men between 20 and 29 years old was 10 to 20 per cent lower in the countryside than in the cities (Van Poppel, 1984). However, this did not have much impact on birth rates, because these were higher in rural areas. In general, deruralisation made it easier to earn an income and to start a family at a young age. In the nineteenth-century Dutch rural regions mean ages at marriage were generally high and celibacy was a frequent phenomenon, although this was less so for the farmers and labourers in the market-oriented coastal areas than for the peasants living in the countryside of North Brabant, Gelderland and Limbourg (Van Poppel, 1992). The mean age of marriage in the Netherlands dropped significantly from the late nineteenth century onwards, from 27.6 in 1860 to 22.7 in 1970 for females, and from 29.3 to 24.7 for males. After 1970 the mean age of first marriage rose again towards respectively 30.0 and 32.8 in 2007, partly because alternatives to marriage (living together and partnership contract) have become more common from the end of the twentieth century onwards.

In Belgium the demographic transition towards lower marriage and fertility rates took off in the third quarter of the nineteenth century in the industrial regions in the Walloon area, due to a combination of deconfessionalisation and changing working and living patterns (Lesthaeghe, 1977). This caused huge regional differences in fertility patterns. Around 1900 in Walloon industrial villages marital fertility had dropped significantly, whereas in the Flemish countryside the fertility ratios were more than

**Table 8.1: Population in the Low Countries, 1750–2000 (millions)**

	Belgium	The Netherlands	Luxembourg
1750	2.2	1.9	0.1
1800	3.0	2.1	0.13
1850	4.43	3.08	0.19
1900	6.69	5.18	0.23
1950	9.07	10.20	0.29
2000	10.23	15.86	0.43

Sources: Historisch Demografische Databank Nederland (HDGN), Central database of historical local statistics in Belgium (HISSTAT); Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg (STATEC).

**Table 8.2: Birth and death rates per thousand in the Low Countries, 1801–2000**

	Belgium		The Netherlands		Luxembourg	
	birth rate	mortality rate	birth rate	mortality rate	birth rate	mortality rate
1801–1850	32.0	24.4	34.8	28.0	.	.
1851–1900	30.5	21.5	34.2	22.8	.	.
1901–1950	18.9	14.1	25.2	11.4	20.6	15.2
1951–2000	13.8	11.5	16.5	8.2	13.3	11.1

Sources: Historisch Demografische Databank Nederland (HDGN), Central database of historical local statistics in Belgium (HISSTAT); Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg (STATEC).

twice as high as in the southern part of Belgium. Until the 1880s the rural pattern of high female age of marriage (29 years around 1850) and a high proportion of never married women (25 per cent around 1850) was dominant. Just as in the Netherlands the mean female age of marriage dropped sharply between 1880 and 1950, from 29 to 22 years. In 1950 less than 10 per cent of the women never married. Together with the general spread of contraception this pushed back the rates of natural growth from the 1930s onwards. Rural regions such as the Campine area, which showed the slowest changes, were the fastest growers in the twentieth century (Devos, 1999).

Differences in timing of the demographic transition were also caused by a disparity in mortality rates. Until the 1880s average mortality was higher in the northern part of the Low Countries (Netherlands) as opposed to the southern part (Belgium). In general, mortality risks were higher in urban and industrial areas. In the Netherlands, however, (except the western part) average mortality in rural areas exceeded the urban rates. After the 1920s regional differences disappeared (Van Poppel, 1984). High mortality rates of young children (under one year) depressed life expectancy significantly until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Mean figures of life expectancy only started to rise after 1880, from less than 40 years to more than 60 years in 1950, and more than 75 years in 2000.

Since the high middle ages the Low Countries have been one of the most densely populated regions in the world. Population density in Belgium and the Netherlands (land area) rose from 98 and 65 inhabitants per square km in 1800 to 351 and 488 in 2009 respectively.<sup>1</sup> Taking into account that only the extended urban agglomerations of Brussels and Amsterdam accommodate more than one million people, this means a relatively high spacing of population density. Deruralisation equalled suburbanisation, defined as a sharp rise of the (non-agricultural) population in the former rural zones.

<sup>1</sup> In 1850, 1900, 1950 and 2000 these numbers were respectively 144, 219, 285 and 332 (Belgium) and 95,157, 301, 468 (Netherlands).

This generated specific rural-urban dynamics and further complicates the definition of rural versus urban population. According to modern international standards hardly any rural zone is left in Flanders and the Netherlands. On the other hand, the notion of what can be considered as rural has been changing continuously during the past century.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century the Netherlands witnessed a modest process of de-urbanisation. The proportion of people living in urbanised settings decreased from 45 per cent in 1795 to 41 per cent in 1850.<sup>2</sup> De-urbanisation was most pronounced in the Dutch coastal regions. Here 49 per cent of the people lived in an urban community around 1860, as against 33 per cent in the rest of the Netherlands. After 1870 the process of urbanisation accelerated. Around 1970 about 67 per cent of the people in the coastal area lived in urban settlements, as against 53 per cent in the other regions of the Netherlands. In Belgium, modern urbanisation took off earlier because of the industrialisation process (Vanhaute, 2005). Around 1800 more than three quarters of the Belgium population still lived in villages with fewer than 5000 inhabitants. This ratio shrank to 66 per cent in 1860, 45 per cent in 1900 and less than one third around 1950. However, hardly one in every eight urban dwellers in 1900 was living in centres with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Urbanisation rates rose most rapidly in the east-west Walloon industrial basin and on the north-south axis Antwerp-Brussels. The expanding industry, followed by trade and services, caused a process of urban growth and suburbanisation. Cities like Brussels, Antwerp, Liège, Rotterdam and Eindhoven are good examples of new, twentieth-century urban growth poles in the Low Countries. Eventually, this economic transformation promoted the marginalisation of agriculture and rural industries, and, consequently, of rural family and survival patterns.

Until the early twentieth century, regional differences in household composition were apparent. In the coastal areas, farmer households used to be large, comprising not only the farmer, his wife and their children, but also several live-in servants. Farmer children usually stayed with their parents until marriage in their late twenties. These large households were vital to secure the supply of labour on the farmstead. In 1830–1850 in the Groningen clay area, for example, the average size of farmer households was 6.7, whereas labourer households only numbered 3.9 persons on average (consisting mainly of parents with their young children). However, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards social differences in household size decreased with the disappearance of the system of life-cycle servants. Neolocality was the rule in the Dutch coastal areas. Only a maximum of 10 per cent of the households could be characterised as extended (three-generations) or multiple (including other relatives). Extended households were usually a temporary stage in the family life cycle. Newly-wed couples stayed with their parents for a short time or elderly people lived with their children for caring reasons.

In less market-integrated parts of the Low Countries the nuclear family was also dominant. In the eastern part of North Brabant, as in some other regions where smallholders were dominant, the multi-generation family remained an exception.

<sup>2</sup> For the Netherlands we defined cities as municipal communities with at least 0.2 per cent of the total Dutch population, including towns that historically had the privileges of a city.

The proportion of ‘non-nuclear’ members (relatives, servants, lodgers and so on) usually was not higher than 10 per cent (Van den Brink, 1996). After marriage, most children started a farm elsewhere, and parents usually did not move in with their children at the end of the life cycle. In many cases the freshly married couples chose to settle in neighbouring villages. This means that short distance migration was of great importance, as in many other regions. However, in several parts of the Low Countries the number of three-generation families tended to grow during the period 1850–1950, in some villages even up to about 60 per cent of the farmer families. Probably this was due to a fall in marriage and mortality rates during the demographic transition, which resulted in a supply shortage of farms and houses. After 1950, when the modern Western way of family life was actively propagated, the extended household became again a less accepted form of family life.

In Belgium, patterns of household composition were very similar (Vanhaute, 2002, 2005). The standard family size of five family members on the Belgian countryside remained stable until the end of the nineteenth century. The average family shrank to fewer than four members after 1910 and fewer than three after 1960. Forms differed highly however. Until 1900 about one in every five households consisted of singles. Eight out of ten households were nuclear families. Only 20 per cent of the households lodged other (family or non-family) members. These static data hide important differences and dynamics in living patterns. In the nineteenth century these point to growing tensions within the household, as shown in the ratios of extra-matrimonial conceptual behaviour. In the Flemish countryside pre-marital conceptions rose from 8–15 per cent (of all first conceptions) in the second half of the eighteenth century to 30–35 per cent in the first half of the nineteenth century. The ratio of illegitimate births multiplied in the same period from less than one per cent to seven per cent. The proportions dropped only slowly after 1880 (Matthijs, 2001). These tensions were considerably fewer in more open, market-oriented regions as the North Holland countryside. Here pre-marital sex reached a peak of about 3,5 per cent in 1810–1815. In the next decades the proportion of illegal births declined rapidly again, reaching 1–2 per cent in the second half of the nineteenth century (Kok, 1991).

In most parts of the Low Countries the marriage life cycle followed a general pattern in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. After marriage and when the children were still young, the number of external members in the household was relatively high. This number decreased after the children reached the age of 12–14, old enough to work. Only at the end of the life cycle of the parents did the number of external members grow slightly again. A considerable proportion of the children older than 12 years of age were put to work on a temporary basis outside the household. Especially in poor families this generated extra income and less pressure on spending. At the same time these servants were cheap workers for the receiving households. This explains why the number of non-relatives in wealthy households was much higher than in families of smallholders. This pattern disappeared in the twentieth century, partly because children stayed at school longer and worked in non-agrarian enterprises. Until the twentieth century standard families of parents and kids formed only a small part of the personal life cycle due to the high mortality risks. Two out of every five marriages broke down

within the first ten years, two out of every three kids lost at least one parent before the age of twenty. One in every three marriages was a re-marriage for at least one partner. In the twentieth century (at least for a short time) the nuclear family became the real standard, because of falling mortality risks and lower fertility rates.

The patterns of the demographic transition in the Low Countries were only marginally affected by international migration. After the agricultural crisis of the 1840s and during the depression in the last quarter of the nineteenth century some regions experienced a modest emigration wave to America. More important was the outmigration towards expanding neighbouring industrial regions such as northern France (around Roubaix) and the German *Ruhrgebiet*. In 1900 about 500,000 descendants of Belgian natives resided in France, of whom 60 per cent lived in the *Département du Nord*. Between 1850 and 1900 emigration surpluses skimmed 8 per cent of the total national birth surplus. During World War I many Belgian citizens fled to the Netherlands, but this was only temporary. Just after World War II the majority of emigrants were farmers, moving to new lands, especially Canada and Australia. The Dutch and Belgian governments supported this outmigration of mostly young families and unmarried men. In Belgium thousands of farmers moved to bigger farms in the Walloon area. These emigrants never made up more than a fraction of the rural population. From the 1960s onwards both countries were confronted with a rather constant stream of immigrants (foreign labourers, immigrants from former colonies, reuniting families, political and economical refugees). In some regions (Belgian and Dutch Limbourg, and Luxembourg coalmining and steel industry regions) and cities this migration changed the structure of the population, but the overall demographic impact remained small, especially in the countryside.

More important was domestic migration. These internal migration flows were strongly influenced by changing labour markets. Between 1830 and 1900 the proto-industrial region of Inner-Flanders lost more than 350,000 inhabitants, while the provinces of Antwerp and Brabant (Brussels) were able to attract about the same number. After 1850 tens of thousands of redundant labourers in Flanders moved temporarily or definitively to the industrial basins in the south. In the Netherlands a similar process developed at the end of the nineteenth century between rural villages and industrial centres. More peripheral regions were affected by stagnation and even depopulation after 1870, such as the Ardennes region and Luxembourg, but also parts of Groningen and Friesland (Alter, Neven and Oris, 2008).

## 8.2 The family and its members

In the Low Countries, as in most other parts of the world, farming was primarily a family business. Other forms of farm management remained exceptions. However, this does not mean that the past centuries did not witness huge changes in the relationship between farm and family. On the one hand, family labour became more and more restricted to the nuclear household, gradually excluding all forms of labour exchange with other family and non-family groups. On the other hand, more inputs than ever came from outside one's own farm and village, making the farmers more

dependent on outside factors. This change in household dynamics is fundamental for our understanding of the 'great transformation' of the past two centuries. Again, it is useful to discern regional differences in order to interpret trends and variations in determinants such as household labour organisation, especially regarding the role of gender and generations.

Gender relations determined the internal household patterns. In the coastal areas labour within the household, on the farm and in commercial activities was traditionally subdivided along distinct gender lines. Housekeeping was the task of females. On the farm women usually took care of the cows (milking and butter making), sheep, pigs and poultry, and they were in charge of the gardens. Weeding in springtime was also an important female activity. The males were occupied with the work with horses and did most of the labour on the land. They threshed the grain in the winter, and in harvest times they reaped the grain and cut the hay, while the women bound the shelves and helped with transport. There was no demand for hired female labour in winter time. During these months male labourers were hired for threshing grain, cleaning ditches and digging the soil. With the introduction of artificial fertilisers from the 1880s onwards farm specialisation became more pronounced. For instance, in Groningen most of the farms specialised in arable farming. The numbers of livestock decreased, reducing the role of the farmers' wives in the enterprise. In farms specialising in livestock production, female labour input decreased also because milk factories took over the butter-making process. The more the process of mechanisation accelerated, the more the input of women's labour on the farm contracted. In the course of the twentieth century farming in the Groningen countryside and elsewhere along the coast became predominantly a male enterprise.

In the nineteenth century about half of the children of the rural population became life-cycle servants. Children of large farmers usually stayed at home. After 1900 the system of life-cycle service collapsed. Higher real wages, new job possibilities, extended school education and possibly a growing need for individual freedom made the position of life-cycle servants increasingly more unattractive. The new attitude toward keeping children at home longer can also be seen as an investment, made possible by the rise in real wages. As a result, male life-cycle servants on farms became rare after World War I, while large farmers kept only one female servant for the housekeeping work at most (Paping, 2004).

Elsewhere in the Low Countries middle-sized farms and smallholders were dominant. Typical was the mixed farm with some arable and pastureland. The mostly poor soils required permanent fertilisation, which explains the labour-intensive way of working. The smallholder farm was almost entirely a family business; those with (temporary) servants were a small minority. Woman and daughters participated in both the work on the land and around the farmstead, caring for the (small) livestock. In sandy regions labour participation in rural households used to be rather equally shared. Household-based activities, such as peasant farming, proto-industrial production and petty trade were divided among husband, wife, children and -if present- other family members. Nonetheless, profits were low and harvest surpluses were hardly sufficient to pay the rent. Declining income perspectives after 1750 were countered by an ever

more intensive labour input. In Inner-Flanders, for example, this resulted in heightened pressure on income and labour inputs. Between 1750 and 1850 labour input per hectare rose by 50 per cent, transforming the small fields into gardens (the so-called 'Flemish horticulture'). Although per capita returns did not rise accordingly, around 1850 still two out of every three families in Belgium relied at least partly on an agrarian income. Basic essentials in most farms were bread grains, potatoes, beans, eggs and butter. The spread of potatoes as a crop after 1750 supported this form of survival farming. This process of intensification, together with additional earnings from proto-industrial activities or seasonal migration, stimulated the rise of relatively poor smallholders on the sandy soils well into the nineteenth century.

After 1880 industrialisation started to play an important role in the family economy of smallholders. New industrial and commuting labour patterns reallocated the household-based activities (children, house, garden, and livestock) to the wife and daughters. The disappearance of the traditional marketing of butter, eggs, small cattle and vegetables accelerated the changes in a more gendered labour division. Children were able to exchange farm work for a job in one of the new factories, often based in the towns or in specific rural areas, for example the Philips factories in Eindhoven and chemical and non-ferro industries in the canal zones in the Campine area. Rural patterns of income pooling disappeared more slowly, as children remained relatively longer in the parents' home and contributed their industrial income to the family economy. Nonetheless, from the end of the nineteenth century new industrial households started to shape new patterns of family formation. In other regions, such as the eastern part of the Netherlands, the tendency to migrate to the cities, such as the textile town Enschede, was stronger, and income earned in industry by juveniles did not always become part of the family economy.

In the twentieth century the labour division in- and outside the agricultural sector became even more gendered, evolving towards a more patriarchal model. For example, in Belgium the official (registered) female labour participation (ages 15–64 years old) dropped from 67 per cent in 1850 to 36 per cent in 1950. Whereas the proportion of women in the total agricultural labour force until 1900 fluctuated around 40 per cent, this dropped to about 25 per cent after 1950 (Vanhaute, 2005). The contours of a breadwinner/housewife model can also be seen in the farmers' families, with a clearer designated task division among husband, wife and children. In this process the 'education' of farmers' wives and daughters by agriculture housekeeping schools or farmers' wives' organisations reoriented them towards household based tasks, supporting male activities in running the modern farm. During the process of modernisation of the Dutch farms between 1955 and 1970 the participation of farmers' wives and children dropped significantly (Karel, 2005; Bieleman, 2008). In Belgium around 1980 60 per cent of the farms had no co-working family-members (wife/children) any longer; in 2000 this number increased to 80 per cent. In the late twentieth century the gendered household-farm model came under pressure again, mainly because of the lack of family heirs. However, the number of women who manage a farm is still relatively small. In 2008 only about 5 per cent of the Dutch farm managers were female (including widows).

Intergenerational relationships were in large part preconfigured by inheritance practices. The market-oriented farmers of Flemish Zeeland, for instance, combined equal inheritances with the indivisibility of the farm holding. However, because of their strong market orientation and the time lag between the marriage of the children and the death of the last living parent, these farmers were not firmly attached to the native ground (Van Cruyningen, 2000). As a result, family succession on farms in the nineteenth-century coastal areas was not the rule. In Groningen about half of the farms went to non-related successors. Farmers tried to cling to their farms as long as possible, and therefore their children were often forced to look for a new holding. The risk of downward social mobility for farmer children was large, certainly when the number of surviving children increased in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. Often some of these descendants of farmers became artisans, shopkeepers or merchants; some even ended up as labourers. In the twentieth century chances for farmer children expanded, mostly because well-paying alternatives became available. The children of rich farmers were usually well-educated and could easily find a job in the rapidly expanding urban and rural job markets during the twentieth-century process of economic modernisation. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards retiring farmers built comfortable houses in the villages and rented out the farm to one of their children. Thus, as elsewhere, family succession on farms became increasingly the standard in twentieth century Groningen. Especially sons profited from this development. As a result of the intensifying process of mechanisation, they stood first in line to inherit the large and valuable farm. However, it has to be kept in mind that due to the relative large number of surviving children in this period of high population growth, the majority of the sons and daughters were not able to take over a family farm. In more modest labouring households, servanthood for boys and girls between the age of 14 and the date of marriage was a normal stage in their life cycle, at least until the end of the nineteenth century. Until the age of 18 their wages were paid to the parents; afterwards they were able to save the money. The system with annual contracts prevented unemployment and provided security in return for a near complete loss of freedom.

In most regions with a predominance of smallholders the farm was often subdivided among the children. In order to preserve the parental farm in some cases unmarried brothers and sisters stayed together (*frères*). A more common practice was that only one child succeeded to the parental farm, after having paid off sisters and brothers. This means that the majority of the children had to rent, buy and build up their own farm. In proto-industrial regions extra wage income could encourage the decision of young couples to start an independent holding, at least in good times. Since income from cottage industries was in decline from at least the late eighteenth century, there was no tendency here towards younger ages of marriage and leaving the parental home. Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century industrialisation, especially in the countryside, forced a breakdown of the old intergenerational patterns. Because of the diminishing opportunity to take over the family farm and the possibility of earning wages at a young age, couples started independent families at a lower age. After 1945 increasing non-agricultural income perspectives and the ideal of the (small)

modern Western family put an end to former rural family patterns. Most children of smallholders lost their ambition to succeed to their parental farm and looked instead for work outside the agricultural sector. Moreover, the modernisation and scaling up of the farms after 1950 put the problem of inheritance in a new perspective. Due to government policy many small farms disappeared and the land was absorbed by the surviving, mostly middle-sized farms. In contrast to the children of smallholders, the descendants of middle-sized farmers had a better perspective in developing an economically healthy farm business. However, family succession became more expensive and risky. Income perspectives were lower than average, the traditional back-up networks of the household or the village economy had disappeared, and farms became ever more capital intensive. Household logics and farm strategies did not coincide any longer. Capital intensive farms were increasingly passed on from one generation to the next via complex juridical constructions (De Haan, 1994).

### 8.3 The family and income

Demographic patterns, credit and income systems, and labour markets underwent fundamental transformations in the period 1750–2000. The process of specialisation and intensification of labour input and industrialisation of farm labour forced families to adapt their survival strategies to the new labour opportunities and income perspectives. This transformed the former village structures and the supportive systems of exchange and credit, and pushed the centre of gravity from the local to the national level. This general process shows specific regional patterns, preconfigured by the existing agro-systems.

The agro-system that is characterised by market-oriented farms and a large supply of agricultural wage labour is most striking in the region of Groningen. The rural economy of most parts of the province of Groningen, just as of rural Friesland, Holland, Zeeland and the small Belgium coastal area, combined commercial market-oriented agriculture with specialisation in non-agricultural activities already from the sixteenth century onwards. Only a minority of rural households consisted of farmers. Farm-sizes were very diverse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, starting from five hectares of agricultural land for small farmer households up to more than 100 hectares for a few large landowners. At the end of the twentieth century, however, even 'modest' farmers needed up to 60 hectares of arable land to survive. Farmers usually hired external farm labourers to do part of the work and were inclined to specialise in either arable production (Groningen and Zeeland) or in dairy farming and beef production (Friesland, Holland, Belgian polder region). Their main goal was to produce as much as possible and to sell this produce for the highest price to merchants or directly on local or urban markets. This strong market orientation caused farmers to be very sensitive to market developments and fluctuations in agricultural prices. In general, the number of these farms grew only to a limited extent, for example in the Dutch coastal area from about 30,000 in 1807 to nearly 45,000 in 1910 (Van Zanden, 1985: 377). In the second half of the twentieth century the number of farms dropped sharply. Numerically more important in these regions were farm labourers, at

least from the early nineteenth century onwards. These labourers usually did not have any land at their disposal, except for a small vegetable and potato garden. Although mainly employed in agriculture, these labourer families performed other unskilled activities, such as dike maintenance and peat digging. Real wages fluctuated in opposite direction to the food prices. During expensive years such as between 1795 and 1818 and around 1850 (potato blight and Crimean War) real wages were low, and labourer families came into difficulties. Fortunately, in most times the employment situation developed opposite to the real wage levels. Cheap years such as the periods 1820–1840 and 1880–1895 concurred with high real wages, but also with a strong increase in winter unemployment. It was only in the final decades of the nineteenth century that the real wages of farm labourers structurally started to rise, a development which continued throughout the twentieth century.

The number of farm labourer households rose rapidly from the end of the eighteenth century until 1880. Labour supply per hectare increased significantly, because the coastal areas had only limited growth possibilities. Land reclamation had reached its maximum, and undivided commons were nearly non-existent. This intensification process resulted in a slight fall in labour productivity, at least until the middle of the nineteenth century. The rising labour input was stimulated by the favourable development of agricultural production and prices in the period 1830–1880. When agricultural prices fell from 1880 onwards, the rise in population suddenly came to an end. Farmers tried to economise on hired labour, and labourer households reacted to rising unemployment by migrating to the cities and to North America. However, it was only after World War I that the number of farm labourers really started to decline. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the nearly complete disappearance of this group. In regions with significant industrialisation this group transformed from an agricultural to an industrial labour class, also accelerating after 1950. For instance, in eastern Groningen many former farm labourers found work in agro-industry, while in Holland many rural dwellers became employed in urban industries.

Another large group of households made their main living outside agriculture, by supplying the local community with products and services (artisans, millers, shippers, merchants, schoolmasters and others). Usually the father was self-employed, or worked with one apprentice and one or more family members. Already in the seventeenth century, the high proportion of rural non-agricultural workers pointed to the extreme specialisation in the coastal areas of the Low Countries as compared to other parts of western Europe. Especially remarkable was that these households were mostly not active in export-oriented (proto)-industries, but that they were completely dependent on local demand. In the twentieth century the number of small firms in industry and services decreased rapidly. Wage-work became more important, first in industry, after the 1960s also in services. Many of the workers became daily commuters to regional industrial centres.

New farmers usually had to pre-finance an important part of their capital investments (farm buildings, land, cattle and farm equipment) by loans. The coastal regions were already in the eighteenth century a full-grown money economy. Credit from suppliers and long-term loans were used by households to make up temporary and more structural deficits of money and capital. Farmers had to rely on informal loans from relatives or

villagers. In some cases a limited number of noblemen and patricians supplied loans. In the twentieth century the credit system slowly changed. Banks assumed a bigger role, and renting the farm became more important, which substantially decreased the need for 'immovable' capital. On the other hand, modern farms necessitate a much higher investment in capital for technology.

The Dutch province of Drenthe is a typical region with an agro-system based on small and only partly market-oriented farmers and peasants. Until the 1970s the economy in this region remained essentially agricultural. Because industrial development was marginal during the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, the labour market for men, women and children was dominated by farm work. The large-scale exploitation of peat, requiring a considerable number of part-time peat workers, was the main exception. Traditionally, the village population consisted of a mix of landowners, tenants, farmers with medium-sized farms and in possession of horses, smallholders without horses, farm workers, and a few craftsmen and public servants. Most of them tilled some farmland, if only as a vegetable garden. In the nineteenth century heath and moor land was still abundantly available and was usually worked as common property. The working of the mostly very fragmented arable land and of the commons (waste land) required some forms of mutual agreement. The large landowners and the middle-sized farmers could generate enough income from the land and their farms. The labour supply was partly met by domestic servants and journeymen. These journeymen were smallholders; the servants were mostly their children. Other smallholders earned additional income as craftsmen (shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths) or small vendors. A common life course of a smallholder started with the parental family until the age of 12, followed by out boarding between 12 and 16 in another farming family, domestic service until marriage, which was the start for working on his own smallholding (Trienekens, 2004; Lindner, 1989; Van den Brink, 1996).

After 1880, and accelerating after 1900, this peasant-based agro-system disappeared. The use of artificial fertilisers made it possible to reclaim the remaining heath and moor lands. On their extended pieces of land the new generation of farmers could produce tubers and roots for the new industries (potato flour and sugar). During the harvest season, these factories employed the peat workers and their families. Elsewhere in the rural villages, labourers could often take their chances to climb to the status of smallholder. The group of smallholders grew relatively quickly in the period 1880–1920. The expansion of a network of farmers' cooperatives made it easier for family farms to produce for the market (Bieleman, 1987). After 1920 the labour markets for peat workers and farm labourers deteriorated rapidly. Migration among peat workers increased. The Dutch government stimulated the industrialisation of the former peat lands around the city of Emmen. Emmen became a typical example of a deruralising society. The municipality, a conglomerate of fifteen rural villages, exchanged the old agro-system for industry, in origin strongly connected to the exploitation of the peat lands, and for the provision of services. The population rose from 1500 in 1800 to 20,000 in 1900 and 40,000 in 1940. Most of the inhabitants were former peat workers and their families. Further industrialisation continued the growth of the population reaching about 100,000 in 2000.

At the end of the nineteenth century the money economy became dominant in more peripheral regions too. The former credit systems of postponed payments disappeared, and farmers had to pay their domestic servants and journeymen in hard currency. Until then, in many sandy small-scale agricultural regions exchanging goods and services remained a custom. This often meant that payments were settled only once a year after debts and credits had been eliminated. This process of monetarisation also affected the so-called *boerwerken*, local social tasks that farmers had to fulfil for the community. More and more these tasks were paid for by taxes and executed by the local authorities. Still, until the second half of the twentieth century, farmers depended on their extended family relations (parents, uncles and aunts, grandparents) to make investments, for example to buy a farm. After the Second World War banks took over the role of credit supplier.

After 1950, the agro-system in Drenthe changed for a second time. This was the result of the general trend of modernisation in Dutch agriculture, which triggered both the specialisation of farms, the unprecedented expansion of the farm size, and the rise of productivity. In 1950 about 195,000 farms were counted in the Netherlands. In 2004 no more than 85,000 remained. In the period 1950–1970 the percentage of farms in Drenthe with fewer than ten hectares of land dropped from 66 per cent to 32 per cent. Many smallholdings were liquidated (Karel, 2005). This marginalisation of agriculture made the family succession of farms much less obvious. Many farmers' children chose for a career outside the primary sector. Without an internal or external heir, the land was mostly sold. Farms today are exploited in several forms of modern partnership. Taking over of the capital-intensive enterprises by the next generation requires careful planning. Although capital investment of farms became more dependent on banks, these enterprises are still to a considerable extent financed by family capital (undivided inheritances). At the same time, the main goals in running the farm shifted. Until the fifties of the twentieth century a main objective seems to have been to pass farms on to the next generation; thereafter the maximisation of profit became a more prominent aim.

In yet another agro-system the combination of agricultural and proto-industrial production has deep historical roots. Until the nineteenth century, the Flemish sandy soils (Inner-Flanders) presented a clear example of this mixed peasant economy. Since the disappearance of the domanial power structures in the high middle ages, the major part of the holdings in this area of the Flemish countryside were small household farms, dominated by the logic of peasant survival strategies. In addition, an extensive rural flax industry developed in the heart of this region, reaching its momentum at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This agriculture, the so-called 'Flemish husbandry', was based on a triple equilibrium: within the holding, within the village economy and in a regional context (Thoen, 2001; Vanhaute, 2007). First, all holdings, large and small, were mixed farms. The combination of a striking variation in arable farming and the breeding of small stock and, if possible, some cattle, was the key to success in peasant agriculture. Due to extremely high labour input, rotation systems were developed, and agricultural productivity was high. Typically, in the middle of the nineteenth century in a Flemish holding smaller than 0.5 hectare (tilled with the spade), 40 per cent of

the land was sown with bread grains (mainly rye) and 30 per cent was planted with potatoes. Secondly, the small family holdings were strongly embedded in the local village economy, and, via the local markets and big farmers, in a broader, regional and sometimes national and -via linen export- even international economy. Big and small holdings were linked to each other via complex dependence relationships and credit systems in the form of labour, goods, services and sometimes money. Small peasants exchanged their labour surplus for the capital and goods surpluses of larger farmers (including horsepower). These local credit networks linked the two logics, the one of survival farming with the one of the external markets (Lambrecht, 2002). In the third place, the mixed holding had to control the equilibrium between production for personal use and sufficient exchange possibilities within the patchwork of local and regional market circuits. The small family farm, with its particularly intensive mixed agriculture, could only survive thanks to a combination of self-sufficiency with income from the sale of some arable produce (e.g. industrial crops and fruit), and meat and dairy produce (e.g. butter and eggs), and, especially, from (proto)-industrial flax processing.

In the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries these developments were accompanied by an increasing differentiation and polarisation (Vanhaute, 2007). In the most densely populated regions of the country, Flanders and the western part of Belgian Brabant, 40 to 50 per cent of the farms were smaller than one hectare and 80 to 85 per cent smaller than five hectares. The typical size of the holding fluctuated between one and two hectares. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, land fragmentation increased, due to the combination of the equal inheritance tradition, the landowner's policy of splitting up farms, the debt increase among peasants, the high population pressure and the introduction of the potato. As a consequence, the need for additional income further increased. In addition, a growing portion of the land and the farms had to be rented. In Inner-Flanders, in the second half of the eighteenth century, two out of three farms were already fully cultivated on lease. More severe land competition increased the rents. Whereas around 1750 a hectare of arable land could be rented for one year for a counter value of 30 daily wages, this price had doubled by about 1800 and tripled by 1850. Rents became a growing part of the peasant's total financial liabilities (rents and taxes): from approximately 50 per cent in 1750 to 90 per cent in 1850. Consequently, productivity returns were predominantly pruned away by landowners. The sharpest rent increases did not occur by accident in regions where farm fragmentation was strongest, lease practice was dominant, and cottage industry was widely spread. This process went hand in hand with an accelerated commercialisation of rural life (many small and regional markets) and a relative revival of small and medium-sized cities. This was not only the consequence of rural society's internal dynamics, but also of the (sub)urban bourgeoisie sponging off rising flows of money from the productive countryside. Landowners, the bourgeoisie from big and medium-sized cities, but also traders and artisans in villages, saw their fortunes grow. They discovered an additional source of income thanks to the increasing demand for credit, so part of the rents went immediately back to agriculture in the form of loans. Farmers contracted huge debts in their struggle for

a piece of arable or pasture land of their own. Proto-industrial expansion probably increased the demand for credit in the villages. Credit granters used their position to appropriate properties under debt.

The Flemish peasants responded to this increased financial pressure with a further self-exploitation, on the land, but also behind the spinning wheel and the loom. In the first half of the nineteenth century, one fourth to half of the population of Inner-Flanders worked in the rural flax and linen industry: 300,000 to 400,000 villagers earned some income in this proto-industrial activity until the 1840s (Vandenbroeke, 1984). Decreasing yarn and cloth prices from the 1820s onwards, however, increased pressure on the Flemish peasants' income. Already in the 1830s, one out of every five Flemish families was registered as indigent.

The second half of the nineteenth century marked the end of the small, mixed and intensively exploited peasant farms. Rents reached historical heights in the third quarter of the century; income possibilities outside agriculture remained marginal. After 1880, surviving family farms were gradually reoriented towards commercial crop and livestock growing. Other smallholdings served as income supplements for the families commuting towards the mines and factories in Wallonia and northern France, and later, to the expanding economic centres around Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels. In addition, between 1880 and 1950 tens of thousands of men and boys travelled each year to the large farms in the south of Belgium and France to earn an extra income during the harvest months. Girls and women could earn some meagre extra income in new rural sweating industries such as lace and clothing industries. Living standards remained low in the countryside well into the twentieth century. The heritage of 'Poor Flanders' could only be left behind in the 1950s and 1960s, with the expansion of non-agricultural activities in the countryside, the fast rise of real wages and the multiplication of government subventions. Farming families became a (small) minority, organising themselves into powerful farmer leagues and adapting themselves to new crops such as maize, flowers and vegetables, and dairy and pig farming. In Flanders, the proportion of farms with fewer than ten hectares decreased from 72 per cent in 1959 to 26 per cent in 2000 (Segers and Van Molle, 2004).

When the existing rural economy came under increasing pressure after 1800, rural households in the Low Countries adapted their income strategies in divergent ways. Predominant were the transformations in the regional labour markets, in the first place rising and declining labour opportunities that could be fit into rural household income strategies. Regional trends started to converge again after the 1880s, coinciding with the declining impact of regional agro-systems. The modernisation of agriculture pushed out all 'non market efficient' smallholdings. Expelled surplus labour could largely be absorbed by urban and rural industrialisation, and by the new service sectors. This process of industrialisation of both farms and labour accelerated after 1950. For the vast majority of the rural, and now also sub-urbanised households, former agricultural income strategies became redundant. This also affected the nature of the village societies and the social relations that constitute these villages.

## 8.4 The family, the local community and the state

While in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Low Countries comprehended three national states, and consequently three legal regimes, the central tendency was, nonetheless, one of unification and codification, erasing regional and local differences. This process of centralisation was not linear, leaving room in the nineteenth century for local and regional customs. Examples are the common rights in the more peripheral sandy and forest regions in the east and the south and the already mentioned *boerwerken* in east Netherlands, which forced the villagers to participate in a range of public tasks such as road building. However, it is clear that the central authorities from the late eighteenth-century French reforms onwards expanded their grip on public life, for instance through a central taxation system and the forced dissolution of the commons. In general this transformation redefined the relationship between the public and the private sphere, affecting also the limits between which rural households could organise their survival. More in particular this compressed the informal space organised by local relationships of help and exchange. Especially in the more peasant oriented societies in the sandy regions and on the afforested hills in the Ardennes, these village networks survived until the twentieth century. These networks were tied together by a complex of credit relations between the larger and smaller farms, between households with a capital surplus and households with a labour surplus. This facilitated the exchange of labour, services and commodities on a local level. Horse labour and transport facilities were exchanged for the labour of children and adults on the larger farms, and on spinning and weaving machines (Lambrecht, 2002). Only after rural societies lost their economic basis and the central states could build up national systems of insurance and protection, these informal networks of credit and exchange disappeared. In this period of transformation, roughly encompassing the nineteenth century, income perspectives for the poorer households deteriorated. That is why, after 1850, they resorted to new, poorly paid rural sweating industries, to exhausting forms of commuting labour, or to selling the labour of their adolescents as servants in neighbouring towns and cities. Income differentials in the villages became bigger; social inequality became more outspoken.

Until the twentieth century local communities were in charge of the support of their own poor, among other things. In most cases this was a combined task for the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Central was the position of the larger farmers, organising both formal and informal relief systems. The formal support was limited to 'structural' paupers such as the aged, widows, the disabled and orphans originating from the labouring class and the lowest parts of the middle class. In almost all rural areas labourer households comprising an able-bodied male only received support in crisis periods. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, because of the potato blight and the resultant food crisis, a high number of rural households (husband, wife and children) received relief (temporarily). Often the percentage of paupers doubled (from 5 per cent to 10 per cent in the Netherlands) or tripled (up to 50 per cent in the former proto-industrial Flemish villages). The combination of the structural dissolution of the rural flax industry, the declining returns on the ever smaller

farmsteads and the acute food crisis caused a classic famine in Inner-Flanders, that only could be overcome by swift and bold public action, both on a local and national scale (Vanhaute, 2007). The coastal region was also hit hard by the mid-nineteenth century rural crisis. The (almost) landless labourer families were extremely vulnerable, and possibilities to increase their income were lacking because of the absence of commons and uncultivated land. The position of the rural poor in the eastern and southern part of the Netherlands was somewhat better. They could often find some uncultivated land to support a living. In the course of the nineteenth century, formal regulations for poor relief - first on a local, from the end of the century on a national scale – prevailed over the more informal systems of support for the local paupers, illustrating the dissolution of the former support networks within the village society. This process was strengthened by the dissolution of the commons in the less market-integrated regions. In the eastern parts of the Netherlands and Belgium much of the uncultivated land was in common use until well into the nineteenth century. Villagers did decide together how to use and preserve this land. Sometimes this was the responsibility of separate organisations of farmers, such as the *markegenootschappen* in eastern Netherlands, until the nineteenth century one of the most important village institutions. In the second half of the nineteenth century the common (mostly uncultivated) land was gradually privatised. Often this was pushed by the local elites, in former times the main protectors of the common rights.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the large farmers not only dominated the system of poor relief, but nearly monopolised the municipal councils. In other regions, the big land owners could accumulate the most important political offices. In some coastal areas, farmers were less influential due to the strong position of nobles (Friesland) and gentry and the more limited property rights of farmers on the land. Until well into the twentieth century rural local politics were mostly controlled by the minority of farmers supplemented by some males from the non-agricultural group. Pushed by the rise of labour unions at the end of the nineteenth century, especially in regions with a considerable rural labour class, this group also began to be represented in local government. This story of the broken monopoly of the power of larger farms and landowners was repeated in the other rural areas, where they used to occupy all the important local offices (*maire*, tax collector). At the same time large farmers lost their interest in local politics, especially after 1950. They no longer were dependent on the local market for their labour, and local situations became less relevant to their business strategies. Moreover, the number of farmers declined dramatically.

## 8.5 Conclusions

How did the process of deruralisation in the Low Countries in the past two and a half centuries affect the demographic and economic behaviour of households? Until the third quarter of the nineteenth century demographic patterns in rural households were predominantly shaped by the structure of and transformations in the regional agro-system. Demographic spurts or declines were more pronounced in

some regions, causing important regional differences. In Flanders, for example, this generated intense population pressure in the nineteenth century, while other, more peripheral regions were confronted with a demographic spurt in the first half of the twentieth century. In the eastern and southern parts of the Low Countries traditional survival patterns survived well into the nineteenth century, while in the coastal areas the market-orientated agro-system had been dominant already for a long time. After 1850, non-agricultural alternatives such as sub-contracting production, commuting and new industrial activities relieved the growing tension between labour and income, but they marked also the start of the dismantling of former rural household patterns of cohabitation and survival. Village communities that were transformed into industrial settings first adopted new demographic patterns. The process of suburbanisation, starting in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, generalised this transformation. In some areas such as Holland the countryside became completely entangled in the expanding cities. Elsewhere the process was more smooth, with the rural communities adapting 'urban' social and economic patterns without becoming urbanised.

The 'traditional' rural societies and their households survived because of a set of social equilibriums, both in their internal organisation (labour division, production cycles) and their external relations. Central in this model were family-based farms with a mixed output (crops and livestock; in some regions industrial goods) and integrated village-based credit systems (exchange of goods, labour, services). This was the spine of two of the three agro-systems in the Low Countries until the nineteenth century. In the long run new economic developments did undermine these foundations of the rural economy. Most fundamental were increasing non-farm income sources, higher rents, the loss of land and the subdivision of farms. An ever growing proportion of the households fell outside the income security of the mixed family farm and the credit-based village economy. This trend culminated in the nineteenth century, marking the end of the age-old peasant societies. From the mid-nineteenth century onward this rural society differentiated into a smaller fraction of market-oriented, specialising family farmers and a growing number of households pooling their income outside agriculture and outside the village economy. Villages in these regions did suburbanise, by becoming part of larger systems of employment, transport and provisioning. In the long run, the broken ties with agriculture of the large majority of rural households opened the road to a continuous rise in economic welfare in the twentieth century.

This development differs with the third major agro-system in the Low Countries. In coastal and clay areas farms were already for some centuries capitalistic family enterprises aiming predominantly at external market production. The majority of the rural households, workers and craftsmen depended, albeit often indirectly, on these capitalistic farms. They offered them wages in return for labour, and money in return for local products and services. Nineteenth-century population growth resulted mainly in a rise in this near landless group, increasing the social differences. The means of existence of all households in these regions were strongly dependent on market forces. When, after 1880, the prices of agricultural products started to fall, the economic position of a considerable number of households worsened. However, outmigration to urban areas and overseas offered a way out, but the system did not change radically.

Gender relations in rural society started to follow new urban patterns. Until the nineteenth century women mostly carried out a set of specific agricultural tasks. Due to the mechanisation of farm work, rural women, as in urban families, dedicated themselves more and more to household work. In regions with a dominant arable farming system this happened at a much earlier stage. Housewives and daughters in small farmer families living near industrial centres often found work in the factories, earning an income in addition to the farm work of the man. After World War II, parallel to the accelerated modernisation of farming, the breadwinner/housewife model became standard almost everywhere. Recent developments, however, caused by economic difficulties in the agricultural sector, have stimulated a revival of the participation of women in specific new tasks of farm work. They start farm shops, camping sites etc., thus creating 'urban farms'.

In the course of the twentieth century the demand for labour in agriculture declined strongly in almost all rural villages, which resulted in the nearly complete disappearance of the large group of labourer households. Even this process changed the rural social order only slowly, with the large farmers and the old rural middle class remaining in place. After World War I deruralisation became more and more manifest. The differences between urban and rural spaces tended to decrease, certainly after World War II. This process accelerated after 1970. Local systems of provisioning (shops) and education (schools) disappeared. Rural dynamics were taken over by suburban patterns of living, working (commuting) and reproducing. Although many aspects of traditional rural life are still visible, social life changed because communities integrated into new urban and suburban labour markets. In addition, the modernisation of the farms stimulated by state planning after 1950 and the resulting dependence on specialised markets, created farmers who were orientated towards national and international developments, rather than local circumstances. Nevertheless most remaining farms in the Low Countries are still family businesses.



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